

EXCAVATIONS AT SARAÇHANE IN ISTANBUL: FIRST PRELIMINARY REPORT

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IN 1960 grading operations at Saraçhane in Istanbul uncovered a large number of richly carved architectural blocks. These were shown to have come from the hitherto unidentified church of St. Polyeuktos, which was built in this area by Anicia Juliana, probably in A.D. 524-7.¹ The archaeological importance of this discovery was quickly appreciated, and the open site where the blocks had been found was laid out as public gardens pending systematic excavation.

A preliminary campaign, authorized by the Turkish Department of Antiquities and the municipal authorities of Istanbul and carried out jointly by Dumbarton Oaks and the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, opened on 3 August 1964 and lasted four weeks.² The site lies in the southwest angle of the Şehzadebaşı Caddesi—Atatürk Bulvarı intersection, and the conversion of this intersection to an underpass afforded a unique opportunity, during construction of the tunnel approach, to probe the eastern limits of the site in depth (figs. A and 1). Our first task was to record what we could in this underpass cutting while it remained open, our second to dig exploratory trenches in the gardens farther west with a view to assessing future

possibilities and requirements. A 5-meter grid was imposed on the whole area, and squares were labelled alphabetically east to west, numerically north to south; trenches cut were mainly either 4 × 4 or 4 × 9 meters, with 1-meter baulks.

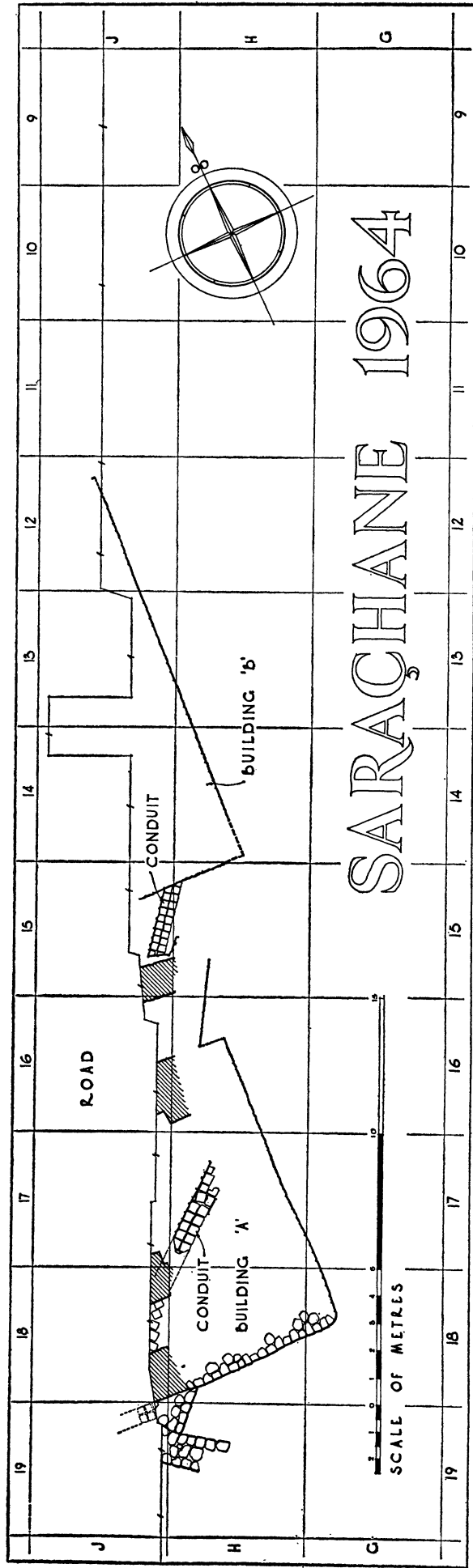
At the beginning of August the underpass cutting had already reached a depth of five meters below modern street level, and on the west side of the cutting mechanical excavators had encountered, and, on the whole, left undisturbed, a mass of deep-lying masonry. Our first few days were devoted to an examination of this masonry, which soon resolved itself into the eastern ends of two adjacent buildings projecting from the side of the cutting. For convenience the southern building is here called A, the northern, B (fig. B).

The eastern face of A had suffered, but the lowest course of masonry fortunately survived to provide the plan. Several large blocks of undressed limestone with dovetail cramps had been salvaged from this area by the engineers. The building's most distinctive features in section³ are four east-west walls, with tile floors in the central and southern of the three "rooms" defined by them (fig. C). These floors lie on a deep foundation of mortared rubble, through which a brick-vaulted conduit runs obliquely. The north end of the building was puzzling: although the northern of the four walls resembles its neighbors and appears to be contemporary with them and their foundations, it rests upon equally deep but differently aligned foundations, which appear to be earlier. Other early foundations were cut by the south wall of A and overrun by a stone-capped conduit.

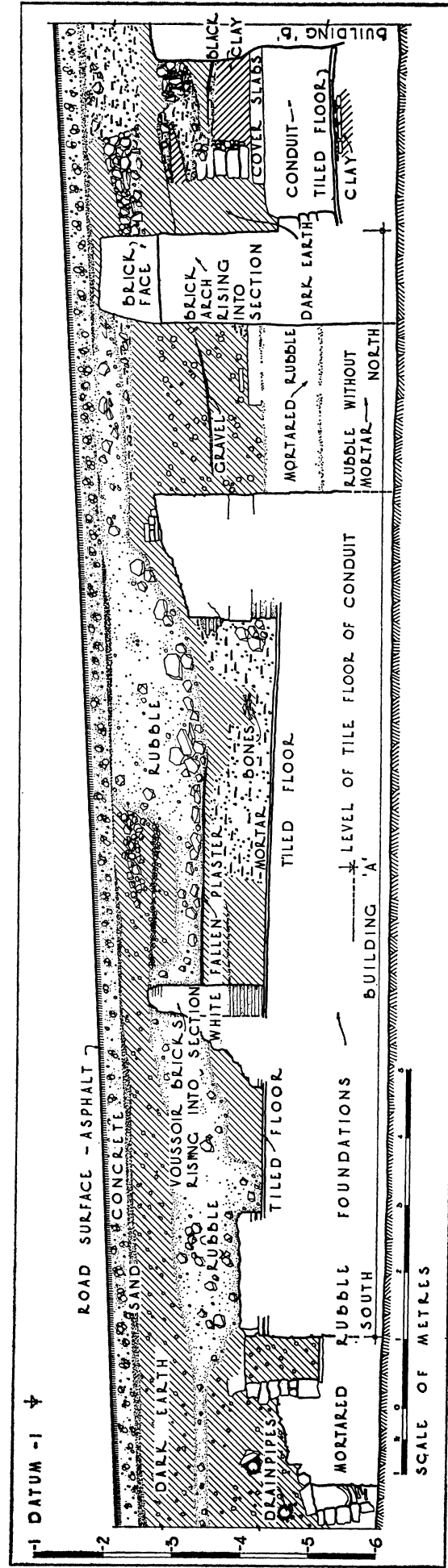
³ The section here reproduced is an oblique cut across A, determined by the line of the underpass; any calculations of width from the drawing must take this into account.

¹ C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, "Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 15 (1961), p. 243 f. The basis of their identification was the recognition that a fragmentary inscription on two of these blocks is part of the long text from St. Polyeuktos recorded in *Palatine Anthology*, I, 10.

² The campaign was directed by the authors, with the help of Mr. G. R. J. Lawson, A.R.I.B.A. (architect), Mrs. Harrison (photographer), and Mr. J. W. Hayes (pottery specialist). The practical assistance at all times of Mr. N. Dolunay, Director of the Archaeological Museum, is most gratefully acknowledged. A brief notice of this campaign appeared in M. J. Mellink, "Archaeology in Asia Minor, 1964," *American Journal of Archaeology*, 69 (1965), p. 149, and pl. 40.



B. Sarachane, Plan of Structures in West Face of Excavation for Underpass



C. Sarachane, Approximate Section of Building A in Underpass, looking west

The eastern face of B was fully exposed and was found to be well preserved (fig. 2). Its length is 15.0, its present height 2.72 m. The masonry is of small, mortared blocks, irregular below a narrow string-course at 1.50 m. from the base of the wall, roughly coursed above it. Its northern end touched our underpass section, and here it could be seen that the foundation trench at the corner had been cut more than 1.50 m. into a deep stratum of black clay. This clay was overlaid by debris which extended south above B, and B was now tackled from above, in the hope of finding the inner face of its eastern wall. It proved, however, to be a solid foundation of mortared rubble, extending at least six meters back from the face.

A and B are 2.50 m. apart, and in the gap a section of conduit running north-south was preserved. This had been cut and blocked by the foundations of both buildings, and served as a receptacle for debris during their construction (fig. 3). The pottery recovered from it provides valuable dating material, as indicated below (p. 235, and fig. D).

A plain, limestone sarcophagus with gabled lid was uncovered on the east side of the underpass cutting, and was recorded by us.⁴

West of the cutting, trenches were opened along the eastern edge of the gardens, both on the line of Building B and north of it. In M/8, just beneath the turf, we encountered remains of the furnace of a small Turkish bath: tiled floor, circular hearth, flues, hypocaust, and immured water pipe, on an extremely hard foundation of mortared rubble. Continuous occupation in this area throughout Turkish times is amply attested by rubbish pits, everywhere intrusive into the Byzantine levels. The high proportion of Turkish and imported fine wares amongst the pottery from these deposits should provide close dating and a good chronological sequence.

In M-N/10-11 brick vaulting and walls began to appear a few centimeters beneath the turf; this complex is here called Building C. A north-south corridor, choked by the

collapse of its barrel vault, was cleared to a sufficient depth to enable us to enter two chambers which opened off it and which, with roofing intact, were only partly filled with debris. An arched doorway in the east wall of the corridor leads into a square room, a pilaster in each corner of which supports the springing of a cross vault. At a later period this cross vault was superseded by four shallow barrel vaults, one springing from each side of a brick well shaft which was now constructed through the center of the room. A third period is represented by the rough rebuilding of the north and south walls of the room, the former blocking an arched doorway.

At the north end of the corridor another arched doorway opens onto the cross-vaulted western end (fig. 4) of a long room, which is barrel vaulted for the rest of its length. This room has in its south wall the blocked arch originally communicating with the square room, and at its eastern end a post-and-lintel opening blocked by external debris beneath the modern road and pavement. The lower courses of the lateral walls are of rough stone, the upper courses of brick, and the barrel vault is constructed of bricks both radially laid and pitched. The brickwork is carefully pointed with red mortar containing a high percentage of crushed brick.

The north wall of the long room was also the north wall of Building C, as became clear in M/9, where its outer face was found, bordered by a drain and revetted with thick plaques of white marble. A hard, plaster floor above the long room bore the imprint of large, oblong paving slabs, evidently the "piano nobile" of which the vaulted chambers are substructures; it should be remembered that a complex of substructures of this kind need bear no relation in plan (except in outline) to the floor it supports.

Farther south, on the line of Building B, M/14-16 revealed substantial brick walls and a related wall of large blocks with dovetail cramps; there are two doorways, one (M/14) paved with marble slabs, the other (M/15) modified by the addition of a semicircular structure, apparently some sort of niche (fig. 5). All this lay in a deep and extensive destruction-layer, which yielded striking evidence of the building's former opulence:

⁴ Cf. N. Fıratlı, "Finds from the Çemberlitaş District," *Annual of the Archaeological Museums*, 11-12 (1964), p. 207, pl. xxiv, 4, for a similar sarcophagus.

i. Fragments of polychrome marble wall veneer in great quantity and variety.

ii. Four types of white marble beading for framing this veneer: one with saw-tooth carving, one with bead-and-reel, a third with dentils, the fourth plain with rounded profile.

iii. Many fragments of wall mosaic, suggesting a design of small triangles; mainly silver, gold, and dark blue glass, white marble and white limestone; one piece is concave, clearly from a vault. Two fragments with carefully juxtaposed pink and red tesserae suggest that there may have been figures.

iv. Several fragments of rather coarse pavement mosaic; white, green, and black marble.

v. One piece of coarse wall plaster painted in seven colors, greys and greens predominating (a leaf design?).

vi. Very many architectural elements of marble, including fine window mullions.

vii. Three fragments of a marble column shaft (diam. 0.37–0.43 m.), cut for an elaborate inlay of hexagons and squares. One fragment was found to have some of the inlay still precariously adhering: triangles and trapeziums of opaque green glass, squares (0.04 m.) of amethyst (figs. 12, 13).

viii. Extensive fragments of a marble frieze (ht. 0.30, thickness 0.05 m.) decorated in high, flat relief with a cross-in-arcade motif; above and below are bead-and-reel borders (fig. 6).

ix. Several small fragments of marble carving in the same distinctive style as the carved blocks found in 1960: the raised veins of leaves and the deep under-drilling of edges made even tiny chips recognizable.

Finally, two more important pieces of carving from other contexts should be mentioned here:

x. Fragment of marble carving with vine leaves and monogram (fig. 7); destruction layer in M/9.

xi. A large pier capital (figs. 8–11) recovered from the western face of M/16 was lying, oddly enough, at the bottom of a large Turkish (seventeenth-century) rubbish pit, into which it had presumably tumbled when the pit was dug.⁵ Proconnesian marble;

⁵ This capital is identical with the pair in the Piazzetta at Venice, which, with their

ht. 0.90, base 0.94 m. square with 0.08 m. rebate at one angle; similar design on all four sides.

Considerably to the west, two long, north-south trenches were cut, two meters wide. These showed that the Byzantine levels, which could not be investigated in the time available, here lie at greater depth, and that the terracing in the southern part of the site is entirely recent.

Buildings A and B are assigned to a period after the opening years of the sixth century, on the evidence of pottery from their foundations. Moreover, a brick-vaulted conduit in the foundations of A yielded brick stamps of a type prevalent in the corridor debris of C, which thus appears to be contemporary.⁶ This type of brick stamp is cruciform and refers to the third year of an indiction. The third year of one indiction began on 1 September 524, which is precisely the year previously suggested on historical grounds for the commencement of St. Polyeuktos.⁷ Construction is known to have lasted three years, and foundations and substructures are exactly where we should expect to find bricks dated to the beginning of this triennium.

That this is the church of St. Polyeuktos seems now tolerably certain, but the elucidation of its architecture must await future seasons. A, B, and C have here been treated

supporting piers, are believed to have been brought from Acre (Ptolemais): cf. M. Kalligas, *Οι πέσσοι τῆς Πτολεμαίδος*, *Arch. Eph.* (1938, pub. 1940), pp. 70–101; also W. F. Volbach, *Frühchristliche Kunst* (Munich, 1958), pl. 208 and p. 85. The similarity of shape and decoration extends to an exact correspondence of base dimensions, and even to the rebate at the internal angle. This relationship is confirmed by the monogram illustrated here (fig. 7), which recurs on the eastern pier at Venice. The Constantinopolitan origin of the *pilastri acritani* is thus assured. Their intimate connection with the material at Saraçhane, and the wider implications of this discovery, will be examined by us on a future occasion.

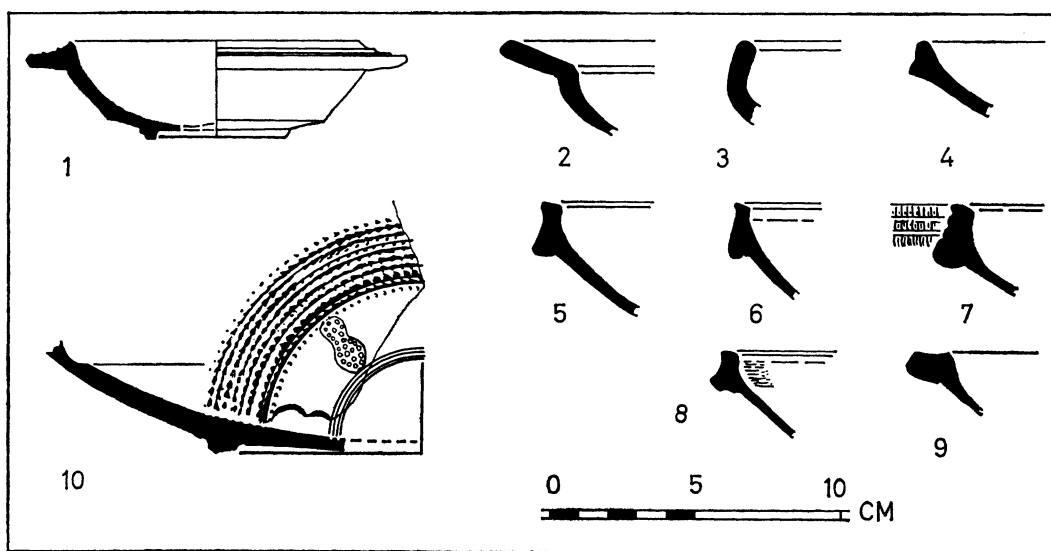
⁶ Of 125 recovered, forty-one were either illegible or too fragmentary to be classified. The remaining eighty-four included ten different types, and amongst these were fifty-nine examples (a proportion of 70 per cent) of a cruciform type recording the third year of an indiction.

⁷ Cf. Mango and Ševčenko, *op. cit.* (note 1, *supra*), p. 245.

as separate, albeit adjacent and contemporary, buildings; it should be borne in mind that this was done only for convenient reference and that their apparent independence may be illusory.

At several points we encountered earlier stone walls divergent from the sixth-century orientation and more nearly aligned with our own grid. These were observed (a) at the north and south corners of Building B in the underpass cutting; (b) in M/15, where a terracotta lamp of late fourth-early fifth-century type was found in the same stratigraphical context; and (c) in M/7, where the

early levels were reached in a few places only; but the finds are significant. Among the finer wares represented, *Late Roman C* is by far the most common, although small quantities of North African ware (*Late Roman A/B*) and of other fabrics also occur. The filling of the conduit between Buildings A and B produced an important group of material (fig. D). Amongst finds here were numerous sherds of *Late Roman C* ware, mostly of types current in the latter half of the fifth century, but with a few fragments which can hardly be earlier than ca. 520 (fig. D, 8). Together with these were a number of



D. Selected Pottery from Conduit between Buildings A and B (2:5):

1-9. *Late Roman C* Ware. 10. Unclassified. 1. Second Half Fifth Century. Almost half extant. 2. Late Fourth-Early Fifth Century. D. (estimated) 30 cm. 3. Late Fourth-Mid Fifth Century. D. 26 cm. 4. Mid(?) Fifth Century. D. 22 cm. 5 and 6. Mid-Late Fifth Century. D. 24 and 25 cm. 7. Late Fifth Century. D. 32 cm. 8. Ca. 520-570. D. 22 cm. 9. Probably Early Sixth Century. D. 22 cm. 10. Very Pale Ware with Orange Slip; Stamped Decoration and Rouletting: Fifth Century (third quarter?). Examples of the same Ware have been found at Athens and Sardis (unpublished)

foundations of a well constructed wall (thickness 1.30 m.) running east-west and of another wall meeting it were found three meters below the present surface. There is at least the possibility that these are remains of the fifth-century church which is known to have preceded Anicia Juliana's edifice.

The pottery found during this first campaign is summarized by Mr. J. W. Hayes as follows:

1. *Late Roman* (fourth to seventh century). The amount found was relatively small, since

sherds of other fabrics which belong to the same period, and a complete lamp of local type which is probably fifth century. An intact lamp from the lowest level in M/15 serves to date the early wall found there; the lamp is a local copy of an early variety of the common North African type (Broneer, XXXI), to be dated to the end of the fourth or first half of the fifth century. Among other parts of the site which yielded sherds of *Late Roman* type, M/7 deserves a mention: here a number of sherds of sixth-century types

were discovered in the fill against and over the low-level wall.

2. *Byzantine*. Most of the Byzantine glazed pottery from the excavation came from an extensive layer in the exploratory trenches along line U, and is of the types represented in Stage IV at the Great Palace—Impressed Ware, Painted and Plain White Wares. A few sherds of similar types were found among the destruction debris over the main part of the site, and also in the drain in M/9. All these presumably are eleventh century. Later intrusions in M/9 and M/12 produced a limited amount of material comparable with Stage V in the Great Palace. Two more or less complete amphorae, of a type found

commonly in our eleventh- to twelfth-century levels, were salvaged from the underpass operations.

3. *Turkish*. All periods from the fifteenth century to the present day are represented in the surface levels. Three pits produced large groups of fine and household wares: one in M/8 to be dated *ca.* 1480–1520; two, overlapping one another, in M/15–16, the earlier of the period 1510–1530, the later (in which was found the large pier capital) of *ca.* 1600–1650. Both in the pits and elsewhere the number of pieces of high quality is conspicuous: Iznik, Kutahya, and “Golden Horn” ware, and Chinese porcelain and celadon all occur.



1. General View of Site from City Hall Roof, looking northwest



2. Underpass, East Wall of Building B



3. Underpass, Early Conduit between A and B, looking south



4. Building C, Cross Vault at West End of Long Chamber, looking southwest



5. General View of M/15-17, looking south



6. Fragment of Marble Frieze



7. Marble Fragment with Monogram



8. Side a



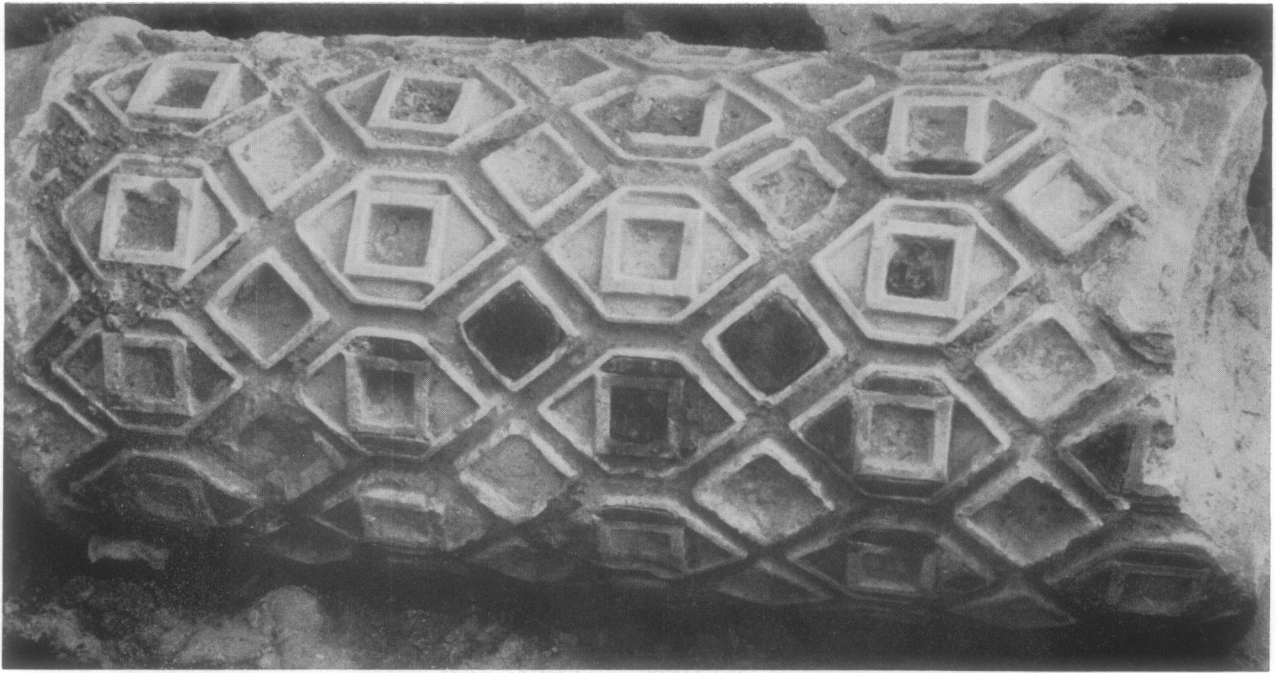
9. Side b
Pier Capital



10. Side c



11. Side d
Pier Capital



12. Upper Part of Inlaid Column as found, with some Green Glass and Amethyst intact



13. Middle Section of Inlaid Column Shaft